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PPS Consolidates Socialist Alliance, Prepares Congress

¶2. (U) The leftist Party for Progress and Socialism (PPS) and its Socialist Alliance partner Al Ahd decided in December 2005 to maintain their partnership after the Socialist and Democratic Party (PSD), the third Alliance partner, defected in December 2005 to the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) party, according to the Moroccan press. The parties agreed that PPS president Ismail Alaoui would lead the Alliance and that Al Ahd leader, Najib Ouazzani, would serve as vice president. The PPS is also reeling from the resignation of two of its parliamentarians, Zhor Chekkafi and Miloud Chaabi. According to Moroccan press sources, Chekkafi left in January 2006 to protest her marginalization and discrimination within the party. Chaabi, meanwhile, resigned in October 2005 for "personal and professional reasons." PSD's defection and the departure of Chekkafi and Chaabi mean that the Alliance, which had been the seventh largest caucus in parliament, now falls four seats shy of the 20 required to form a caucus in the lower house. The PPS will hold its seventh annual national congress in April 2006.

Eid al-Adha: Prayer, Sacrifice, and Pardon

¶3. (U) To mark the occasion of Eid al-Adha on January 11, King Mohammed VI performed the Eid al-Adha prayer at the Ahl Fes mosque in Rabat, accompanied by his younger brother, Prince Moulay Rachid, and cousin, Prince Moulay Ismail. Following the prayer, the King took part in the ritual sacrificing of a ram in front of a distinguished audience that included the Prime Minister, speakers of both chambers of parliament, royal advisers, and other civilian and military officials. Keeping in line with his tradition on the occasion of important religious or national holidays, the King pardoned or reduced the sentences of 1059 prisoners, according to Moroccan press.

Morocco and Kuwait Join Forces to Promote Moderate Islam

¶4. (U) On December 27, Minister of Islamic Affairs Ahmed Toufiq, inked with his Kuwaiti counterpart, Abdullah al Maatouq, a Memorandum of Understanding on Islamic affairs that aims at promoting religious moderation and a return to Islam's original principles via modern technology and media. According to Kuwaiti press, in a statement delivered at the signing ceremony Toufiq highlighted the necessity to counter extremism in the name of religion. In other bilateral news, earlier in December, Kuwait and Morocco held a cultural week in Kenitra, located 60 kilometers north of the capital, that focused on creativity in literature. The event was organized with the cooperation of the Moroccan Author's Association as well as the Ministries of Education and Culture, and featured poets, intellectuals, and authors from both countries.

King Supports Moroccan Children's Parliament

¶5. (U) On January 8, in message read by Princess Lalla Meriem (the King's eldest sister), King Mohammed VI reaffirmed to the fifth session of the Children's Parliament his desire for a national plan to promote the rights and improve the situation of children in Morocco (NB: the King first called for a national plan for children in May 2004). The session held in Rabat and chaired by Princess Lalla Meriem, who serves as president of the National Observatory for Children's Rights and of the Children's Parliament, brought together kids from all over Morocco to foster interaction and debate. In his message, the King noted that he views the Children's Parliament as "tantamount to a school grooming children in democratic practice and civil attitudes, arousing greater awareness of the virtues of dialogue, coexistence, and open-mindedness, and shunning all forms of exclusion and extremism."

Morocco Creates Young Scientist Academy

¶6. (U) On the heels of last month's meeting of the World Academy for Young Scientists in Marrakech, the Moroccan government established on January 6 its own academy for young scientists in an effort to encourage and promote scientific research and strengthen communication within the Moroccan scientific community. According to official news agency Maghreb Arabe Presse, the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research, Habib El Malki, has urged the academy to raise awareness on the importance of combining scientific knowledge with religious and cultural values to contribute to sustainable development and to tackle the challenges associated with globalization and international changes.

Vietnam Opens Embassy in Rabat

¶7. (U) On December 23, the speaker of the Vietnamese National Assembly, Nguyen Van An, attended the inauguration of Vietnam's embassy in Rabat. Also in attendance was Abdelwahad Radi, speaker of the Moroccan House of

Representatives. The new Vietnamese ambassador to Rabat, Ngu Tay Dyung, expressed his desire that the embassy contribute to developing and reinforcing bilateral relations at all levels, while Radi added that this will open new important markets for Morocco in Asia.

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